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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001355

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL REACTION TO PM SELECTION

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Initial reactions from provincial contacts to Nuri Kamal (Jawad al-Maliki)'s selection as Iraq's next PM have been positive. Shia Islamists tended to view the new PM as equally capable as Jafari at promoting the UIC agenda. Sunnis and Kurds tended to question his independence, while expressing general relief that the Jafari era is over and Government formation can move forward. END SUMMARY

Anbar

¶2. (C) The Sunni Arab mantra in Fallujah has long been that PM Jafari needed to go and that they want strong leadership above all else. The Fallujah police chief told SETOFF April 22 that he did not care if a rock star became Prime Minister, as long as the new leadership improves security. Anbar Governor Ma'moun told SETOFF that while Maliki is only known as a spokesman for Dawa, his initial promises on April 22 seemed promising. Ma'moun added that key factors to watch will be Maliki's stance toward militias and the selection of cabinet positions.

Diyala

¶3. (C) Contacts in Diyala -- both Sunni and Shia -- expressed relief that government formation is finally underway. Mixed with this relief was a sense of apathy about the new government's prospects of resolving the current security situation. A Sunni provincial council member from the central, conflict-ridden region of Abu Sayda glumly predicted that conflict would continue unabated in his area. A Kurdish provincial council member's only positive comment was that at least Jafari is now gone. Sunni contacts focused on the importance of the selection of the as-yet-unnamed ministers in determining success of the new government.

Kirkuk

¶4. (C) Contacts in Kirkuk expressed satisfaction with the progress made toward government formation. Bahman Husayn, Head of the Kurdistan Toilers Party in Kirkuk, likened a country without a government to an airplane without a pilot. Najat Hassan, Head of

the KDP in Kirkuk, said the new government must establish a plan to restrict interference from neighboring countries. Omar Muhammad, Head of the KIU in Kirkuk, commented that his party will strongly support the new government which it would call upon to take steps to improve living conditions and end corruption. Jalal Jawher, Head of PUK Kirkuk, indicated that the KDP will work to support the new government, which will ease Iraqi suffering and provide a new foundation for trust throughout the country.

Mosul

¶5. (C) In Ninewa, diverse political party contacts generally reacted positively to the selection of Nuri Kamal to lead the new government. While many claimed they did not have enough information about his administrative ability, they tended to believe that he would be an improvement over Jafari. Contacts characterized him as a strong personality without much high-level leadership experience. Non-Shia questioned the PM-designate's independence, given his allegiance to Dawa, particularly with regard to militias and consensus building. National Assembly member Mahmood Al Azzawi from INDC claimed Maliki as a good friend, but doubted his ability to draw UIA away from militias and sectarian strife. PUK provincial spokesman Omar Azzo saw him as a strong leader, but one who would still "have to take orders" from the Dawa leadership. Ninewa KDP leader Khassro Goran said he did not have much faith in

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Maliki's qualifications and doubted Maliki's ability to be "truly independent" of Jafari (who occupies a higher rank in Dawa) and the UIA. Gevara Zia, Ninewa provincial council member (Assyrian Democratic Movement), said he believed Maliki was a "secular man" who did not have the same sectarian views as Jafari but who "without a doubt, will support Muqtada Al Sadr." Hameed Zenal of the Shia, Shabek Democratic Assembly (SDA) party said Maliki would be "on the same path" as Jafari, meaning he was "loyal first to Muqtada Al Sadr."

BABIL

¶6. (C) Babil Deputy Governor Hassoon Ali Hassoon (SCIRI affiliated) said Maliki was a good choice because he is number two in the Dawa party and the UIC lost nothing by replacing Jafari with him. The most important issue, Hassoon said, was that the UIC agenda will be implemented irrespective of which Dawa member is PM.

¶7. (C) Sabah Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord expressed support for any PM who will apply the constitution regardless of sectarianism or ethnicity. Adnan Abid Al-Turki, an Islamist journalist from Al-Fayhaa newspaper, said Maliki was a good compromise solution. He noted that the UIC could accomplish its program, whether through Jafari or Maliki.

NAJAF

¶8. (C) Provincial Council Chairman Dr. Abdul Hussein Al-Mousawi welcomed Maliki's nomination. Mousawi expected Maliki to have a more stable

support basis in the Council of Representatives than Jafari. Mousawi surmised that the Kurdish and Sunni blocs would offer substantive concessions to the UIC for agreeing to drop Jafari. If such concessions are made, Mousawi predicted that the remainder of the government formation negotiations will move quickly. Sa'ad Zawain, the Islamic Dawa Deputy head in Najaf, asserted that Maliki would be "more flexible" than Jafari.

Basrah

19. (C) Basrah Governor Muhammad al-Wa'eli told REO April 23 that the selection of the Prime Minister-designate was a step forward. Though 555 is still extant, he offered, fissures resulted from the Jafari nomination. Dr. Hayder al-Wa'eli, Head of the Fadillah party in Basrah, told REO on April 22 that Fadillah supported Maliki because of the PM-designate's support for national unity. (COMMENT: In contrast, Nadeem al-Jabiri told PolOff April 22 that, in the previous day's UIC 555 internal meeting, The Fadhila Party voted for al-Jabiri as PM, while the other six parties, which he termed "Iranian" voted for Maliki. In an April 23 phone conversation with PolFSN. Mohammed Ismael al-Kusai claimed that the Fadhila party CoR members all turned in blank ballots during the voting for the Presidency Council and the CoR Speakers.) Hassan al-Rashid, Head of Badr Organization in Basrah, said that the problem of forming the government has now been solved and the difficulties removed.
KHALILZAD